

ARTICLES FROM THE

2000'S VOL. 1

ABOUT

MICHAEL DRAKE

Featured Artist: Michael Drake

CD Title: Sazzunk

Year: 2006

Record Label: Drake Records

Style: Various Jazz Styles

Musicians: Michael Drake (trumpet), various guest artists including Ken Kosut on piano, Mike Powers on baritone saxophone, among others.

Review:

Michael Drake continues to amaze and delight with his intimate jazz trumpet talents, and each CD he releases further reveals his enduring sounds. His sound is always clean, intricate, and full of verve.

This CD collection has six long, enjoyable songs. The titles are "Funky Monkey," "Alone With You," "Winter's End," "Somethin' We Did," "Jamaica," and the intricate "Las Estrellas En Tus Ojos (The Stars in Your Eyes)."

"Las Estrellas En Tus Ojos" has three distinct and complex parts: Fugue, Bolero, and El Festiva. Each section is interesting in how it illustrates the remarkable stylings of Michael Drake on trumpet. Also, each section shows the sensitivity of Drake's memorable performances. Paula Marie Bynum provides an excellent vocal for "Jamaica," one of the most enjoyable songs to come down the pike in a while! The versatile Johnnie Padilla plays piano and flute on "Las Estrellas En Tus Ojos." "Alone with you" shows Theo Merriwether on piano, at his best.

The CD is alive with fine musicians playing at their finest! Jessie Kuscinski excels on steel drum, and Eric Larsen gives the listeners some nice trombone sounds.

This is a very nice jazz CD and covers many jazz styles. There is definitely something for everyone in this fine collection of imaginative songs written by Michael Drake. Highly recommended.

Artist's Website: <http://www.drakemusic.com>

Reviewed by: [Lee Prosser](#) www.jazzreview.com



WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT **SAZZUNK!**

*Michael Drake's compound of
salsa, jazz and funk!*

BY LEE PROSSER

Michael Drake continues to amaze and delight with his intimate jazz trumpet talents, and each CD he releases further reveals his enduring sounds. His sound is always clean, intricate, and full of verve. SAZZUNK has six long, enjoyable songs. "Las Estrellas En Tus Ojos" has three distinct and complex parts: Fugue, Bolero, and El Festiva. Each section is interesting in how it illustrates the remarkable stylings of Michael Drake on trumpet. Also, each section shows the sensitivity of Drake's memorable performances. Paula Marie Bynum provides an excellent vocal for "Jamaica," one of the most enjoyable songs to come down the pike in a while! The CD is alive with fine musicians playing at their finest! This is a very nice jazz CD and covers many jazz styles. There is definitely something for everyone in this fine collection of imaginative songs. Highly recommended.



"NO TAN LINES BAND"

BY SCOTT YANOW

Michael Drake is a rather prolific and versatile musician. A fine trumpeter, he has led eight CDs of original music thus far, performing jazz, funk, Latin music, reggae, romantic mood music and programs for children. As Mr. Pickles, he has created two volumes of children's books which contain nine poem stories, also set to original music. Drake leads several different groups including his Jazz Lines band which was featured on his previous "It's Nice In Paradise" CD and his more recent "Sazzunk", a name derived from the words Salsa, Jazz and Funk.

Utilizing a big band that is augmented by steel drums and percussionists, Michael Drake performs six of his originals on "Sazzunk". The opener, the blues-based "Funky Monkey," is funky and catchy with Drake's trumpet in the lead and the piece featuring some rapid lines from the ensemble. "Alone With You" gives Drake an opportunity to stretch out on a straight ahead piece. The warmth that he shows during the melody statements recalls Freddie Hubbard a bit. "Winter's End" finds Michael Drake playing muted during an energetic rendition that has plenty of funky riffing from the horns and the rhythm section. "Somethin' We Did" is an upbeat jazz waltz with some of the trumpeter's best playing of the set. A change-of-pace, "Jamaica" is a danceable number featuring spirited singing from Paula Marie Bynum. The concluding piece, the three-part "Las Estrellas En Tus Ojos (The Stars In Your Eyes)," is the most extensive and ambitious performance of the CD, clocking in at over ten minutes. It starts with a perfectly-conceived classical fugue for the brass. That section is soon succeeded by a romantic "Bolero" with Drake playing with plenty of feeling before the ensemble romps during "El Festiva," an exciting Latin jazz performance that acts as the perfect climax for this fine CD. Michael Drake's Sazzunk is easily recommended to a wide audience and features the trumpeter at his best.

"I Live my attitude"

— MICHAEL DRAKE

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MILWAUKEE POST

MARCH 17 - 23, 2007

MILWAUKEE COUNTY'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

Always the entertainer

*40-year music career
continues to evolve
for Michael Drake*

By **CHRISTY SNEIDE**
Special to The Post

Michael Drake is still living his dream, captivating audiences with his dynamic tropical jazz and invigorating trumpet sounds. For nearly three decades he has played his music professionally on the Milwaukee scene, establishing himself as a respected artist and successful musician.

Performing live recently, Drake and his three-piece No Tan Lines Band play harmoniously for a private party at Riptide Seafood Bar and Grill, 649 E. Erie St. Drake plays trumpet, percussion and provides vocals, while Domingo Toro plays the congas and Paula Vynum sings backup and accompaniments with the maracas. The trio produces a distinctive sound that combines Latin jazz and Caribbean beats with the crisp melody of Drake's trumpet solo.

A true entertainer in every sense, Drake's showmanship dazzles a crowd and sets them in motion to jive. He makes an extended effort to engage the audience with his music; walking around tables situated around the dance floor with drumsticks in hand, Drake taps them together to the beat of the congas. With microphone on, he approaches nearby guests sitting along the bar and sings to them. Drake enjoys the crowd and even dances with a few women gravitating toward the band, to the tune of "You make a difference in my life - you make a difference to me."

"Tonight our world is musical wallpaper," Drake said. "It's nice to have the band, but it's not really why people are here". This is an after-work party for people to wine and dine, socialize and network.

* * *

Drake has been playing his music for 40 years. Although he has made a name for himself as a musician in Milwaukee, he is not a native. He moved to Milwaukee from Tulsa, Okla., in 1971 with his parents and stayed here to continue his education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

He began playing trumpet professionally with local Latin bands that played traditional orchestra standards like merengue, salsa and bolero. He also played in American bands that played standard classics like "Misty," "September Song" and "In the Mood."

"We played in Milwaukee area night clubs and these were great experiences," Drake said.

Eventually this exposure led him to branch out and form his own band, Nexus. In the 1980s, Nexus became known for its jazz-fusion musical style. Later his music evolved into a Caribbean style, and in the 1990s, he began playing in places like the Florida Keys and the Caribbean during the winter months.

"This is how I became coined the Jimmy Buffet of the Midwest," Drake jokingly admits.

Throughout his career Drake has played in local country clubs and bars, at private parties and at Summerfest and Jazz in the Park. He's performed in Canada and the Dominican Republic.

Drake has declined offers to play on cruise ships for six months at a time since "that's too confining," he says.



Submitted photo

Local musician Michael Drake has recently released a new album called Sazzunk.

"As a musician you wear many hats," Drake says. "You wind up doing all these things at the same time: designing, playing and maintaining your emotional stability."

Drake equates his music career to the spokes on a bicycle tire supporting a frame. He constantly ponders, "What spokes do I need to work on to make my tire become sturdier and faster?"

* * *

"A lot has changed in the music scene," Drake says. "I'll generalize it: a lot less live music and more DJs."

Drake says bands have typically tried to redefine their concept and play just one kind of music style. These bands have narrowed their song lists and "shot themselves in the foot." There are less variety bands playing today because DJs are the ultimate in song variety, he says.

"There was a time when the band would move wherever the audience was. Now bands move the audience," Drake said. "Years ago the band would have a conversation with the audience. Now, bands have set agendas and play only what's required. 'Here's my set - take it or leave it.'"

"Many bands have stopped reading and working the audience," he says "DJs at least work with the audience."

Drake remembers in the 1970s when everyone played all the music. That provided more opportunities to play.

"Back then we were able to make it happen. Today fewer musicians read sheet music. They typically learn a few songs off a recording, and that's it. Back in the day, it was expected that we know how to play a variety of 300 to 500 tunes, and be real," he says.

"That's where my roots come from," Drake says. "I would string melody songs together and ad-lib them as the evening went on."

* * *

Today Drake is making a concerted effort to make his new album nationally recognized and introduce listeners to the other side of his music.

"Intellectually, there is another side of me people might not know," Drake says.

Drake keeps the dream of playing internationally alive and being recognized for the work he does.

"You can either have a small project and spend your life creating that, or create a big project and let them find you," Drake says. And that is exactly what Drake hopes for with his new album, *Sazzunk*, a blend of salsa, jazz and funk. The music on the recording is all original and can accompany a solo to a 25-piece band.

When Drake is creating music in the studio, he is immersed in every detail.

"It takes about three to four months to experiment with many layers of sound in the production aspect," Drake says.

"Blending flavors and spices to get the vavoom, everything has to be balanced. It's really involved art."

Milwaukee Post 2007

Always The Entertainer

40-year music career continues to evolve for Michael Drake

By CHRISTY SNEIDE

Michael Drake is still living his dream, captivating audiences with his dynamic tropical jazz and invigorating trumpet sounds. For nearly three decades he has played his music professionally on the Milwaukee scene, establishing himself as a respected artist and successful musician. Performing live recently, Drake and his three-piece No Tan Lines Band play harmoniously for a private party at Riptide Seafood Bar and Grill, 649 E. Erie St. Drake plays trumpet, percussion and provides vocals, while Domingo Toro plays the congas and Paula Bynum sings backup and accompaniments with the maracas. The trio produces a distinctive sound that combines Latin jazz and Caribbean beats with the crisp melody of Drake's trumpet solo. A true entertainer in every sense, Drake's showmanship dazzles a crowd and sets them in motion to jive. He makes an extended effort to engage the audience with his music; walking around tables situated around the dance floor with drumsticks in hand, Drake taps them together to the beat of the congas. With microphone on, he approaches nearby guests sitting along the bar and sings to them. Drake enjoys the crowd and even dances with a few women gravitating toward the band, to the tune of "You make a Difference in My Life." "Tonight, our world is musical wallpaper," Drake said "It's nice to have the band, but it's not really why people are here". This is an after-work party for people to wine and dine, socialize and network. Drake has been playing his music for 40 years. Although he has made a name for him self as a musician in Milwaukee he is not a native. He moved to Milwaukee from Tulsa, Okla., in 1971 with his parents and stayed here to continue his education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He began playing trumpet professionally with local Latin bands that played traditional orchestra standards like merengue, salsa and bolero. He also played in American bands that played standard classics like "Misty" "September Song" and "In the Mood." Eventually this exposure led him to branch out and form his own band, Nexus. In the 1980s, Nexus became known for its jazz ' fusion musical style. Later his music evolved into a Caribbean style, and in the 1990s, he began playing in places like the Florida Keys and the Caribbean during the winter months. "This is how I became coined the Jimmy Buffet of the Midwest," Drake jokingly admits.' Throughout his career Drake has played in local country clubs and bars, at private parties and at Summerfest and Jazz in the Park. He's performed in Canada and the Dominican Republic. Drake has declined offers to play on cruise ships for six months at a time since "that's too confining," he says.

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"Blending flavors and spices to get the vavoom, everything has to be balanced. It's really involved art."

Warm Weather Cruise

Skipper Michael Drake sets sail

BY DAVID LUHRSEN



Michael Drake

Long as anyone remembers, the *Iroquois* made its way along the Milwaukee River every summer, saluted by raised drawbridges on its way to the harbor. The pleasure boat has carried generations of sightseers onto the water during the warm months. What better entertainment for the *Iroquois'* first cruise of the season than a shipboard show by the No Tan Lines Band, purveying what bandleader Michael Drake calls "island music."

Drake, a trumpet player, is no slouch on his instrument. The one-time spokesman for Getzen trumpets became known as early as the '70s for his proficiency in a variety of Latin and fusion settings. Since then, he's become a prolific recording artist and songwriter, releasing no less than eight CDs. He has also cultivated an easy shtick as an entertainer, a trouper determined to raise a smile from audiences that raise their plastic cups of beer in return. Drake has become an outdoor festival and private summer party monster, his sunny disposition as warm as the season's weather.

Drake's island music is a splash of Jamaica, a jigger of Trinidad, a pinch of Brazil and a slice of Cuba shaken and stirred. He serves it along with hula-hoop and sing-along contests to maintain the party ambience.

"I love those rhythms, so wild and varied," he says of the music. "I combine all these influences. I'll go with happy, upbeat music from anywhere the weather is warm."

Until recently, Drake spent the winter months working the resorts of the Caribbean from Cancun through the Florida Keys. "It was a great time, but it got a little old. I wanted to be back here and be with my family. But I'm the island guy in town. It makes sense to book me on a boat tour," he says.

Along with the "don't worry, be happy" sound of the No Tan Lines Band, Drake plays straight jazz on other occasions, conducts music clinics and workshops and is developing an exercise DVD to the beat of his music. He's even begun writing children's books in cleverly wrought verse. "Creativity—the destination is always around the corner. I'm always hungry for something else," he says.

The No Tan Lines Band performs 9 p.m.-11 p.m., Saturday, May 24, on the *Iroquois*. Tickets are \$22. For more information, call (414) 294-9450 or write info@mkeboat.com.

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SHEPHERD
EXPRESS

Shepherd Express 2008
Warm Weather Cruise / Skipper Michael Drake sets sail
By David Lührssen

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Shepherd

EXPRESS

expressmilwaukee.com | MAY 7 - MAY 13, 2009 |

Books

Book Preview

Growing Up

Local musician turns children's author

BY DAVID LUHRSEN

Trumpeter Michael Drake is a familiar name to long time music fans around town, a Latin-smooth-Caribbean-Jazz player with eight CDs and 30-plus years in his resume. But recently the musician took an unanticipated turn: He became a children's book author. The biggest inspirations were his grandchildren; Victoria, 4 and Ferris, 1. Drake begins writing curious verses to entertain them, remembering that his grandmother did the same thing when he was a kid. "And then my wife, Lori, talked about writing a cookbook for kids. A half-dozen things were hinting at me to do this." This became an ambitious scheme called "The Growing Books," each installment a set of poems with verses brightly illustrated by Madison commercial artist Kay Lum. Circulating word of his project online, he received submissions from some 50 illustrators nationwide.

Lum impressed him most: “When I first viewed samples of Kay’s art on her website, I said to myself, ‘Yes!’ I loved her style, and frankly I was tired of looking at submissions that were good but just didn’t get to me where it counts. Thus far, Drake has published two volumes of “The Growing Books” in several formats, including DVD (with his own voice-over,) coloring books, CD (with downloadable text) and out shortly traditional perfect-bound books.

He is working on translating his whimsical poems, with titles such as “Mootsy the Rootsy” and “I’m a Dreamer” into Spanish. “We really click creatively” Lum adds, “We inspire each other’s ideas and bounce them back-and-forth until we come up with what we feel is the perfect solution, laughing most of the time!”

And laughter is Drake’s calling card--great gusts of laughter. As a musician he always looks as if he’s having a terrific time, and one easily imagines him shifting gears only slightly to entertain children with these spoken words.

Celebrate ... DOWNTOWN WAUKESHA

Serenading downtown Waukesha

Drake plays the ukulele at the farmers market, take the streets with trumpet

By Andrea Fencel
Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA — If you attended the farmers market in the past year, chances are you may have encountered a ukulele player serenading pedestrians with personalized songs. Michael Drake, known as Ukulele Drake at the farmers market, has been performing songs on the ukulele in Waukesha for the past year.

"The people here in Waukesha are happy people. It's really neat to feel that interaction going on," Drake said.

He started playing trumpet in fourth grade after a man came to his class for show-and-tell with a cornet. In his teens, Drake traveled to Mexico frequently, and after moving to Wisconsin, Drake began playing in Latin bands, influencing his music to develop an island style.

"The first gig I had was at a VFW hall and we paid to play. We were doing Limbo Rock, little did I know I would continue to play island type music," he said.

Two years ago, Drake began performing trumpet in Waukesha with friend Hal Kacanek and together created 2Trumpets. After

Ukulele Drake plays at the market, the two can be found outside Steaming Cup around 11 a.m. Saturdays, playing classical music such as Bach and Telemann.

"We said, well, let's play on the street here on Saturdays," Drake said.

Drake began playing the ukulele last November.

"I thought this would be fun to do for my kids shows," he said. "I integrate the ukulele into literally everything I do, except the classic trumpet, it wouldn't make sense to do that."

He also plays piano and percussion.

"I could have gone so many different directions as a player. All these different instruments and different things it's like paging through a magazine, what do I want to do, so I said how can I decide," he said.

When asked what his favorite instrument was, Drake said, "Depending on what I'm playing at the time, that's my favorite. When I'm doing the ukulele and I'm entertaining there's nothing more that I like to do. When I'm playing classical music there is nothing more I like to do. When I'm playing my jazz stuff that's my favorite — it has to be."

"You don't want to be

thinking 'I wish I was doing something else,' no, it has to be for that moment. The most important moment of your life is that one that you just lived," he continued.

Drake said he has performed his entire life, although considers his early official performances to have taken place during high school. Interacting with people is Drake's favorite part about performing.

"When I play the trumpet I have my nose in the music; I don't really get to talk to people — I'm creating an ambiance in the streets. But

when I'm at the farmers market I'm one-on-one."

When Drake attends the farmers market as Ukulele Drake, he asks people for their names then makes a song on the spot, putting himself in a sometimes challenging position to create rhymes. Drake also acknowledged the importance of reading people. Most of the time, he said, people are willing to have him sing a song using their name, but sometimes people are embarrassed or busy, in which the best action is to just move on. The songs are free although



Andrea Fencel/Special to The Freeman

Michael Drake, known as Ukulele Drake, sits with his ukulele at The Steaming Cup during an interview July 6.

he will accept tips.

Drake performs for charities, retirement homes, weddings, and children's events in which he goes by

the name Mr. Pickles.

More information on all of Michael Drake's music can be found by visiting Drake Music.com.

The FREEMAN
Waukesha County's Daily Newspaper

SATURDAY
July 9, 2016



The Freeman Waukesha Daily Paper 2016

Serenading Downtown Waukesha

Andrea Fencel

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The FREEMAN

Waukesha County's Daily Newspaper

150 YEARS

THURSDAY
MARCH 11, 2010

Creativity guru

Musician turns his talent to children's books

By Melissa Rigney Baxter
Special to TimeOut

WAUKESHA – The energy is the first thing you notice.

At 59, Michael Drake is energetic and excited about all of his ongoing creative projects, and though he participates in a variety of medias, Drake says he communicates in one singular style.

Drake is a prolific musician and has performed and recorded solo and with local bands, including the No Tan Lines Band, Jazz Lines Band and Unplugged.

His first single, "Jessica," was released in 1980 and became a local hit. He has made several CDs and these days plays at various events, writes music and lyrics.

He's added one more number to his repertoire as a children's book writer.

After the birth of granddaughter Victoria, now 4, he began thinking of some of his children's verses as more than poetry or song lyrics. He began writing a children's book.

"Victoria thinks I'm a star," Drake said.

So far, the series called "The Growing Books" includes two volumes, in English and Spanish, as well as companion coloring books. He published the books through AuthorHouse and sells them on his Web site at www.drakemusic.com, as well as through Barnes & Noble Bookstores and at events.

"When I decided I was going to do this, I sent an e-mail to all my contacts looking for an illustrator," Drake said.

He narrowed the choices down until he selected Kay Lum, a Madison-area illustrator. Drake said he worked with Lum to help the words come alive by combining the text, art and colors in a

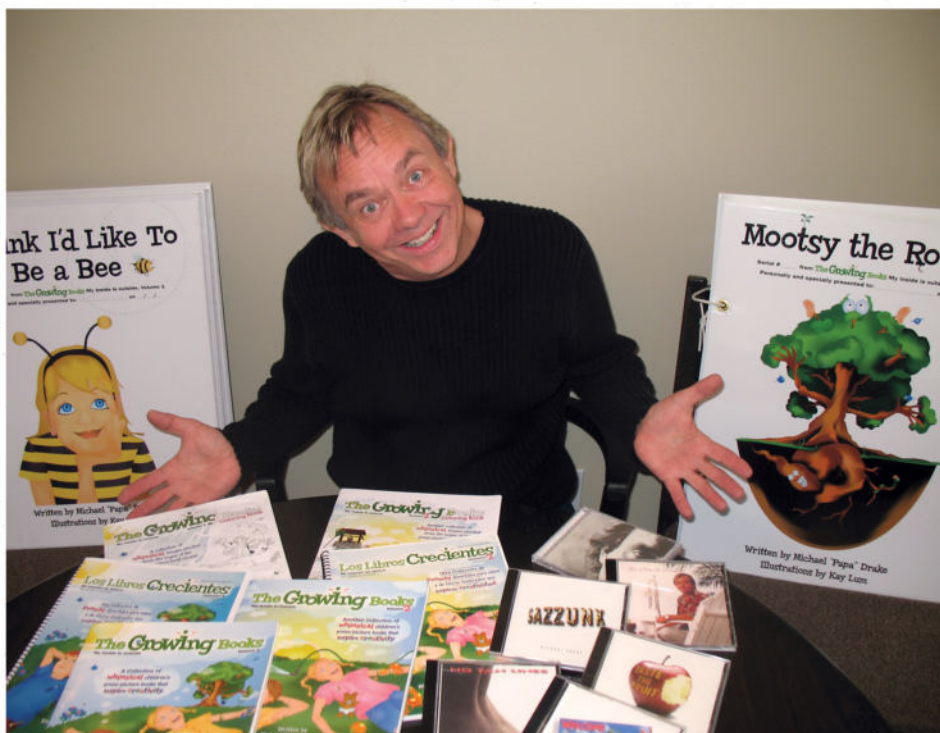


Photo by Melissa Rigney Baxter/Special to The Freeman

Michael Drake of Waukesha has expanded his repertoire from music to children's books.

unique way.

"The words become part of the illustration," he said.

As a performer himself, Drake focuses on how the books should be read to children.

When someone purchases a book from him at an event, he asks them to "audition" their reading skills.

"If people buy one, they have to read it first. If they don't read it so kids will be entertained, I won't sell it to them," Drake said with a laugh.

For Drake, fun, creativity, words and music all come somewhat naturally. At times, he said, he has trouble halting his creative process.

"Melodies and words are the same thing, ten thousand layers and shades," he said. "It's a lot of fun."

Although children's books are a new creative outlet, Drake said he's always interacted with audiences as if everyone is 7 years old.

"Everything is integrated," Drake said. "It's not just the kids, the music, the humor and the words. They are all complements to each other. I couldn't separate them."

Drake will be appearing at the Betty Brinn Museum at 1 p.m. April 10 with the Island Kids Show music and doing readings from "The Growing Books, Vol. 2."

During the weekend of April 16 through April 18, he'll be appearing at the Bob Kames Foundation 2010 Jazz Festival, as well as participating in Kidsfest & Baby Expo at the Wisconsin State Fair Grounds.



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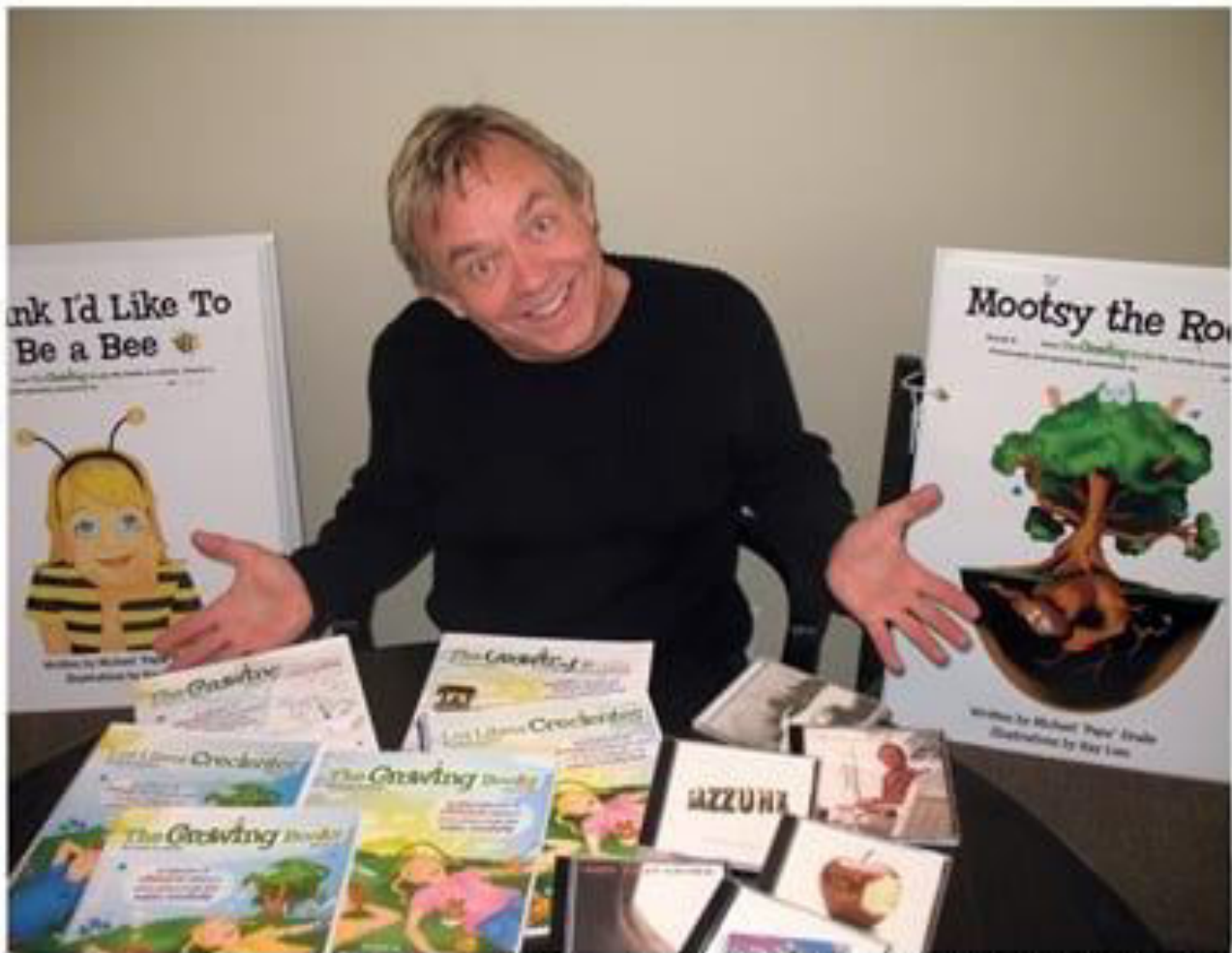


Photo by Melissa Rigney Baxter/Special to The Freeman

2010

By Melissa Rigney Baxter

The Energy is the first thing you notice. At 59, Michael Drake is energetic and excited about all of his ongoing creative projects, and though he participates in a variety of media, Drake says he communicates in one singular style. Drake is a prolific musician and has performed and recorded solo and with local bands, including The No Tan Lines Band, Jazz Lines Band and Unplugged. His first single "Jessica," was released in 1980 and became a local hit. He has made several CDs and these days plays at various events, writes music and lyrics. He's added one more number to his repertoire as a children's book writer. After the birth of a granddaughter Victoria, now 4, he begins thinking of some of his children's versus as more than poetry or song lyrics. He begins writing a children's book. "Victoria thinks I'm a star." So far, the series called "The Growing Books" includes two volumes in English and Spanish, as well as companion coloring books. He published the books through Author House and sells them on his website at www.Drakemusic.com as well as through Barnes & Noble bookstore and at events. "When I decided, I was going to do this, I sent an email to all my contacts looking for an illustrator." He narrowed the choices down until he selected Kay Lum, a Madison area illustrator. Drake said he worked with Lum to help the words come alive by combining the text, art and colors in a unique way. "The words became part of the illustration." As a performer himself, Drake focuses on how the books should be read to children. When someone purchases a book from him at an event, he asks them to "audition" their reading skills. "If people buy one, they have to read it first. If they don't read it so kids will be entertained, I won't sell it to them," Drake said with a laugh. For Drake, fun, creativity, words and music all come somewhat naturally. At times, he said, he has trouble halting his creative process. Melodies and the words of the same thing, 10,000 layers and shades, it's a lot of fun." Although children's books or a new creative outlet Drake, said he's always interacted with audiences as if everyone is seven years old. "Everything is integrated, it's not just the kids the music, the humor and the words. They are all complements to each other. I couldn't separate them" Drake will be appearing at the Betty Brinn Museum.

Shepherd EXPRESS

expressmilwaukee.com | APRIL 8 - APRIL 14, 2010

Books

Book Preview



Calling Mr. Pickles

Milwaukee's Michael Drake entertains the kids

BY DAVID LUHRSEN

Michael Drake is like a house with many additions, with each new wing flowing openly into the original floor plan. The Milwaukeean made his name in music, playing Latin jazz and upbeat fusion before latching on to what he calls "island music," smoothly syncopated with a Caribbean lilt. Inspired by his grandchildren, Drake began writing humorous verses with the idea of producing illustrated children's books. Lately, he juggles animated "performance readings" from those books with his ongoing musical career. Sometimes, the music and the kids' verses meld into one.

"My persona when I read from the books is Mr. Pickles," says Drake, a man born to be on stage—any stage. In part his enduring career in music is based on his personable demeanor. He has always been determined to make everybody in his audience happy. Entertaining the toddlers was an easy step.

So far, Drake has published the first two volumes of his series, *The Growing Books*, along with a bilingual English-Spanish edition and an accompanying coloring book. A translation into French is in the works. A believer in giving back,

Drake donates a portion of the proceeds to Children's Hospital.

"As a songwriter since the '70s, I wrote my own words," Drake says of the transition from musician to children's book author.

"I always wanted the words to sound like the music," he continues, highlighting the seamless flow between his whimsical verses, such as "Dancing with Mr. Brussell Sprout" and "To Bee or Not to Bee," and the colorful illustrations by Madison artist Kay Lum. "As our grandchildren came up, the desire to write these things was overpowering. 'No' was not in my vocabulary! 'Know' was, but no 'no'! I just had to do it!"

Drake will give a "performance reading" 1 p.m. Saturday, April 10, at the Betty Brinn Children's Museum. The following weekend will be especially busy for the irrepressible Drake, aka Mr. Pickles. He will juggle playing music at the Bob Kames Foundation Jazz Festival, April 16-18 at the South Milwaukee PAC, with children's entertainment at State Fair Park's KIDSfest, April 17-18, where he will read at the Book Nook and perform an "Island Kids Show" at the World Music Stage.



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MAGGIE VAUGHN



Michael Drake

MICHAEL DRAKE AT THE PIANO

OFF THE CUFF
WITH MILWAUKEE'S
MR. ENTERTAINMENT

BY DAVE LUHRSEN

I love entertaining," says Michael Drake. No one who ever saw him in person would argue the point. A prolific recording artist with nearly a dozen albums to his credit, Drake began as a jazz trumpeter but branched out into Latin and Caribbean-flavored "island music" along with children's shows. Never less than fully animated, Drake is a percolating coffee pot of highly caffeinated ideas. Recently, he took up a Wednesday residency on piano at a long-running West Side restaurant, Pitch's Baby Grand, 11320 W. Bluemound Road. Drake entertains from 7:30 p.m. to whenever.

No band? No trumpet? Just solo piano?

Just me and the baby grand with no sequencers. I've always loved Billy Joel and the great piano songsters. And I've repurposed my island music for this gig as romantic music—ballads. But it's still all done with an entertainment attitude. It's all about the stories. I tell stories in song. By changing my format to piano, I'm setting the stories in different places.

What do you play at Pitch's on Wednesdays?

It all depends on who's there. I might noodle and create the wallpaper if the mood is quiet. An entertainer has to read the audience. It can go in any possible direction. Without sequencers, I can change the character of the song I'm playing on the spot. If someone wants to come up and sing a Beatles song, I'll accompany him. I've got a repertoire of 150 Beatles songs.

You take requests?

I've got a song list sitting on the piano, 400-500 songs. I've got them categorized. It's all part of the entertainment thing. An entertainer cannot be selfish. I'm pouring my heart out on that song for the person who requests it!

How long have you been making a living at music?

That depends on what you mean by making a living! I played my first paid gig in 1967. I delivered the *Chicago Tribune* for 15 years. Finally, I was able to get rid of the day job in the early '90s.

Have audiences changed over the years?

There's been a change in receptability. More and more people don't know what entertainment is. It's a conversation! Back when I played weddings, I'd have everyone in the palm of my hand. I still do, but it's more work. People aren't used to seeing entertainers in person any more. Being an entertainer is a one-on-one relationship—a rapport. You can't get that from a TV screen.

For more on Michael Drake, visit drakemusic.com.



Shepherd Express 2014

Drake at The Piano

By Dave Lührssen

“I love entertaining,” says Michael Drake. No one who ever saw him in person would argue that point. A prolific recording artist with nearly a dozen albums to his credit, Drake began as a jazz trumpeter but branched out into Latin and Caribbean-flavored island music along with children’s shows. Never less than fully animated, Drake is a percolating coffee pot of highly caffeinated ideas.

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by Mora Jameson From The Getzen Company

Mora Jameson: Well, Michael, how did you get started in music?

Michael Drake: I haven't really started yet... I sorta look at it that way 'cause of the old line that I love, "The more you learn the more you learn how little you know." In 4th grade, a schoolmate brought a cornet for show and tell, and I do believe it was a Getzen. I was enthralled by the sound of that horn...I was hooked from that point on. After my show of interest, my dad bought me a bugle and I played on that for a while, until I guess I got my lip to figure out how to make the different sounds. Well, I do not have that bugle anymore, I am sorry to say, but he then bought me a cornet for \$5.00. I still have that horn. The bell is missing, but it is really a wonderful piece of memories for me...

MJ: Did you come from a musical family?

MD: Both of my parents were musicians and they attended music school. My father got a degree, played sax and clarinet and sang tenor. My mother played piano and the two of them did some part time gigs to help themselves through college. Of the 5 kids, including myself, my two sisters are quite musical as well. Sister Wendy lives in Florida and at one time was recording children's religious music. Sister Jody lives in Nashville and does some country singing on the side. She has a wonderful voice. As a family, we used to all sing. My two brothers just sing and have a good time.

MJ: Is there any particular teacher that stands out in helping build your abilities?

MD: When the family lived in Cape May New Jersey, I took lessons from a man named Ed Bischoff, a wonderful player. The thing that impressed me was that for starters he wrote out all the exercises that I was to play in a book.....it was very cool. The most motivating aspect to Mr. Bischoff was that he lived in a small trailer and he was physically handicapped and permanently in a wheelchair. In addition, he was missing his index finger and thumb on his right hand, so he played the valves with the last three fingers of his right hand. I figured if this guy could do what he did on that horn, I will never make excuses.

MJ: What advice do you have for aspiring young trumpeters?

MD: In addition to “the more you learn the more you learn how little you know” and “I will never make excuses..... NEVER and I repeat NEVER watch the clock when your practicing..... you’re done practicing when you’re done.....

MJ: I know many readers will be interested in this... Do you have a regimented warm up and practice routine? If so, what works for you? How much do you practice each day?

MD: In the perfect world I would love to say that I have a regimented warm-up and practice routine. Some days are more perfect than others. I do gravitate towards a variety of exercises... hard and soft blowing, breath attacks, flexibilities, some mind/finger dexterity things, and a little hatha yoga.

MJ: Which Getzen horn or horns do you play?

MD: Getzen Renaissance Large bore (20S-LB trumpet).

MJ: What do you like about this horn?

MD: I have complete confidence in the consistency from one Renaissance to another. This is v e r y important. This tells me that the horn was built with a certain attitude in mind. In other words... they didn’t just get lucky with the way my particular Renaissance plays. It is truly “one of a kind” that is virtually CLONED..... The craftsmanship allows me to always feel the horn is never in my way and responds directly from my needs and is truly an extension of my energies.....craft....and creativity.....

MJ: Any special mouthpiece or theory on mouthpieces?

MD: I Have been playing the same mouthpiece for 30 years. My advice is to find one, work into it and stick with it.

MJ: What styles of music do you enjoy playing the most?

MD: On any given day or part of a day it can range from classical to jazz to Dixieland, depending on my mood.

MJ: Michael, tell me about the “No Tan Lines Band.”

MD: Well, I generally go by Michael Drake and then, because of the implied entertainment value, I go by the “No Tan Lines Band” when I am doing festivals, bars, etc.

MJ: Did you go to school for music?

MD: Yes, I went to the University of Tulsa during 1970 and 1971. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee from 1971 through 1972.

MJ: What trumpet players did you listen to as you grew up? ...and which had the biggest impact/influence on you?

MD: I listened to quite a variety of players including Al Hirt, Dizzy Gillespie, Herb Alpert, Miles, and many, many more.

MJ: Do you have any special projects in the works right now?

MD: I am in the process of recording my 7th CD. Never Too Late is a proposed title for it. The orchestration will be full big band arrangements and more of my original tunes.... I have 3 more CD's worth of music in the oven ready to produce.

MJ: Anything else you can think to add for our readers?

MD: Being a band leader and running a business as a self-employed person definitely has its advantages... my work is my hobby. I feel very fortunate to be able to do what I do and make a living. One has to learn how to wear many hats in this business.

MJ: Thanks, Michael, and all the best on your upcoming CD, Never Too Late.

Visit www.drakemusic.com to order Michael Drake's CDs. [Contact us](#) to receive a new poster celebrating the release of his latest CD, *It's Nice in Paradise* (recorded on the Getzen Renaissance 20S-LB trumpet).